

Book review

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Zvonka Zupanič Slavec

## A History of Healthcare and Medicine in the Slovene Lands



Part I: From traditional to  
Modern Healthcare and  
Pharmacy (2017), 456 pages



Part II: Surgery,  
Gynaecology and Obstetrics  
(2018), 462 pages

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A History of Healthcare and Medicine in the Slovene Lands I (2017) and II  
(2018) by Professor Zvonka Zupanič Slavec, MD, PhD, a medical historian and

head of the Institute for the History of Medicine at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Ljubljana, is a comprehensive work on the development of healthcare, medicine, nursing and pharmacy. The monograph is a scientific synthesis of medico-historical, medical, pharmaceutical and other scientific sources and literature, shown through the spirit of the time, the development of science, society and national possibilities. It systematically presents the achievements of domestic experts and institutions and at the same time places healthcare, pharmacy and science in an international arena. The monograph is an encyclopaedic representation of science, healthcare, medicine and pharmacy in Slovenia, with the focus on the Central Slovenian region. It will be published in three separate books and together counts over 1,500 pages, equipped with thousands of references and over 3000 images, mostly photographs from national archives. Before us lies the first and the second part. A quick look through the table of contents shows a multitude of subjects, which present medicine both chronologically and geographically, connecting it with other scientific fields, nursing and pharmacy in the world, together with the socio-economic, cultural and educational conditions in Slovenia. The synthesis shows the complexity of the development of healthcare and its tight connection with society. The language is fluid and transparent despite a condensed and scientific context and invites a wider circle of readers. Each chapter is a well-rounded unit. The author uses established medical and pharmaceutical terminology, thereby passing on Slovenian terminology to the reader. The structure is logical and transparent, the chapters of similar length and form. The work is based on a wide selection of sources and literature, some of it very precious and rare, including interviews with senior doctors and scientists where there was a lack of other types of sources. The mention of many forgotten protagonists stands out; many of them expanded on in short biographies. Technically the monograph is practically thought out: minor information is included in comments; the main text's stressed areas enable quick searches and an overview of the text. The biographical data includes the date of birth and death. An extensive subject index and references are added. Especially important is the rich pictorial and photographic content (around 2,200 photographs) including very rare ones, to help illustrate historical personalities, medical equipment, operating theatres, surgeries, different uniforms (for example those of nurses from religious orders), diplomas, in short, to take the reader to a certain period. The photographs revive the memory of people who helped turn the wheel of history. The group photographs illustrate and commemorate the spirit of

teamwork and cooperation, while the photographs of book covers of educational textbooks show the importance of education, nurturing domestic experts and forming Slovenian terminology. The tables, graphs and charts give us a better overview of data. The monograph fills a void in the history of Slovenian medicine, pharmacy and healthcare. The author and her co-workers used their knowledge, diligence and extensive literary experience to condense the wide field of the history of medicine, healthcare and pharmacy into the work you see before you. Prominent experts collaborated, including as reviewers of different chapters. The work will find users in medicine, pharmacy, nursing, healthcare and the social and charity services. It will be used as a reference by students of medicine, nursing and pharmacy and also to all of us who realise that health and disease are a part of our everyday lives. It is a lauded contribution to our national scientific history and professional tradition.

From the contents: The monograph consists of three parts. The first two span around 50 chapters and sheds light on the evolution and development of medicine, from before the New Age (folk medicine, first medical schools, monastery medicine and charity institutions) to more modern times, focusing on medicine and healthcare in Slovenia from the 18th century to contemporary times. It systematically introduces prominent Slovenian doctors and those who worked among Slovenian doctors up to the 20th century. It describes the development of public healthcare systems and legislation, healthcare centres, family medicine and occupational medicine. The first part shows the development of all kinds of hospitals (civil, military, general and secondary or tertiary) and private healthcare institutions (sanatoriums). There is a lengthy chapter on the development of the Civil Hospital in Ljubljana - from its beginnings in 1786 up to the contemporary University Medical Centre. Disaster medicine deals with medicine and paramedic care in WWI and WWII, partisan healthcare, war invalids and their rehabilitation. Supplying medicines to doctors and the population is an important part of the book. Descriptions of the development of pharmacology, pharmacists, big pharmacies, the pharma industry (Lek, Krka), representatives of foreign drug companies, quality control, safety and efficiency in supplying the whole of Slovenia and abroad and prominent personages are included. Pharmacy is an important branch of medicine and was in fact unified with medicine until the 13th century and became an independent field much later on with the emergence of control over drug use and quality control. Monuments to medical and pharmacological history are presented

along with historical collections, institutions, statues and commemorative plaques of inventors and scientists, street names, autobiographies and other memoir literature on that topic. The second part shows the development of surgical fields of medicine - surgery (general, abdominal, traumatology, cardiovascular, neurosurgery, thoracic surgery, plastic and reconstructive surgery, surgery of burns, urology, paediatric surgery and maxillofacial and oral surgery) and others, such as ophthalmology, otorhinolaryngology and cervicofacial surgery, orthopaedics and gynaecology with obstetrics. The development of supportive fields is also described: anaesthesiology, transfusion medicine, transplantation medicine and the diagnostic-therapeutic fields such as radiology and nuclear medicine. Chapters also touch on the nursing staff; however, nursing is expanded on in the third part of the book. Rehabilitation medicine concludes the second part of the monograph. The third part of *The History of Healthcare and Medicine in the Slovene Lands* (will be published in 2019) shows the development of non-operative fields of medicine including internal medicine and its branches (cardiology, angiology, intensive internal medicine, pulmonology, gastroenterology, endocrinology, nephrology, rheumatology, haematology, geriatric medicine and toxicology), paediatrics, infectious diseases, neurology, dermatovenereology, oncology and psychiatry. Also featured are the development of dental medicine, nursing, laboratory and diagnostic services, microbiology and immunology, pathology, forensic medicine and other pre-clinical professional and research activities, natural spas and rehabilitation centres, medical education, medical associations and their publications and other medicine related institutions in the central Slovenia.

The motto of all medical and healthcare personnel remains the health and wellbeing of individuals and society, focusing on prevention, treatment and rehabilitation with the aid of social policies, patients associations and groups, non-government organisations etc. It also touches on the spiritual side of disease development and treatment. The goal of this monograph is to give our descendants a written monument to the development of Slovenian healthcare in the widest sense of the word. The author tried to include all the highlights in the Slovenian geographical area; however, the main emphasis is on the central Slovenian area as it remains the area with the highest concentration of knowledge, experience, scientific, research and educational activity and expert technology.

This work is a monument to the efforts of all medical personnel and society in the endeavour to save lives and demonstrates a rich preventative

activity that improves the quality of life and lengthens life expectancy, including rehabilitation and palliative care with spiritual support, which is very important in humanising medicine and helping patients deal with disease and death. To enable greater ease of use, this work has an abstract and an English translation at the end of each chapter, and a résumé of the book's content at the very end.

The reviewers accompanied the work with statements: heroic work, masterpiece, pioneer work, the most magnificent monument to Slovene physicians... The work is an encyclopaedic view of the history of medicine in Slovenia and will be the basic textbook for all future doctors. But it is also a warning to the future generations to maintain the same humanism as was present throughout the history of healthcare among Slovenes.

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